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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how to use stories to promote beginning communication and language in students with severe communication and/or cognitive impairments. It describes a layering approach for building emergent literacy and augmentative and alternative communication skills. This layering approach is used with professional staff to introduce strategies or layers of facilitation techniques including technology in a gradual manner. The approach is designed to allow consultants to address the needs of a broad range of students, reinforce layers that already exist within a particular classroom or program, and/or compliment or move the facilitator to the next level or layer of implementation techniques. The paper begins by providing general philosophies on using stories to support language and literacy development and then describes the following layers for implementing aided-language stimulation techniques: (1) supported story retelling; (2) supported story readings; (3) supported story retelling; (4) independent story readings; (5) supported story construction; and (6) skill development, including word matching, phrase matching, phonemic awareness, and recognizing punctuation. Strategies for using books for learning in inclusive settings are also addressed. (Contains 11 references.) (CR)

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Using Stories to Promote Beginning Communication/ Language and Emergent Literacy Learning

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It is often difficult if not impossible to change a teachers curriculum if you are the "outside consultant. " Many professionals in the field of augmentative communication find themselves in this role. New perspectives on using stories will be presented with an emphasis on a layering approach for building emergent literacy, language and AAC. Goossens (1999) uses "layering" as an approach for implementing aided-language stimulation techniques within classrooms. This layering approach is an excellent way to introduce stories in classrooms who have students with severe communication and/or cognitive impairments. This layering approach is used with professional staff to introduce strategies or layers of facilitation techniques including technology in a gradual manner. With this approach the consultant is able to address the needs of a broad range of students, reinforce layers that already exist within a particular classroom or program and/or compliment or move the facilitator to the next level or layer of implementation techniques. This presentation will demonstrate the use of "layering" to implement emergent literacy and beginning communication skills across a broad spectrum of story related activities.

General Philosophies on Using the Stories

Repeated Readings

When children are allowed to select the stories to read with partners, they frequently choose to read the same ones over and over again, sometimes fatiguing parents or other reading partners. A review of the literature suggests that repetition is a very productive strategy in supporting language and literacy development. Story reenactments are very important in literacy development, giving children the opportunity to establish and practice powerful strategies that they will later use in mature readings (Holdaway, 1979). With this research in mind and based on clinical practice, I suggest reading the stories in this manual daily for three or four weeks.

Will repeated readings bore children? They are more likely to bore the adult. Research supports the idea that, given a choice, young children prefer multiple readings of their favorite stories than the "Book-of-the-Day" approach. A retrospective survey by Light and Kelford-Smith (1993) found that preschool children who used AAC systems to communicate had fewer opportunities for repeated readings than their peers without disabili-

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ties. They theorized that children without disabilities typically select their own books for storybook reading, while mothers generally initiate storybook sessions with children using AAC and therefore pick the books. When children choose books, they often pick familiar books, since they know the story and can anticipate their roles.

Storybook Centered Thematic Approach

Based on studies showing positive results from interactive, repeated storybook readings, many facilitators develop natural learning activities based on storybook themes (Hoggan & Strong, 1994; King-DeBaun, 1990; Norris & Hoffman, 1995a, 1995b). Musselwhite and King-DeBaun (1997), distinguish between two basic categories of books based on how they are used:

The first category is books for literacy / language learning. These books, which carry the theme, should be used for repeated reading experiences, developing literacy-related extension activities, and communication/ language learning goals.

The second category is books for enjoyment/ enrichment. They tend to be more traditional popular and classic children's stories. They include books intended to enrich the curriculum, help develop world knowledge, and support the current books for literacy / language learning. These books are not offered for multiple readings, unless the children request them.

In keeping with the concept of storybook-centered thematic learning, each unit is organized around a core storybook (or books) from which are drawn thematically related learning activities and a range of learning goals.

In this approach, the facilitator uses a set of vocabulary words derived from the target story for most activities throughout the day. This technique offers children with low verbal skills and children with limited access to vocabulary, including augmentative communicators, opportunities to learn the new vocabulary, to use it in a variety of situations, and to experience success in daily activities. Such an approach increases children's comfort and confidence, since familiar vocabulary appears for multiple activities, rather than new vocabulary being attached to each activity, as happens when the facilitator has a series of unrelated learning activities.

Implementing Storytime

Goossens (1999) uses "layering" as an approach for implementing aided-language stimulation techniques. This layering approach is an excellent way to introduce storytime in classrooms.

LAYER 1: Supported Story Retelling

- The facilitator should use "stories for enjoyment/ enrichment"
- The facilitator should concentrate on the content of the stories
- The facilitator should expect children to participate by inserting small parts or pieces of the story. (For example in The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Bill Martin Jr., the children would insert the different fruits, colors. or days of the week. In Chica,Chica ABC by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault, children can insert the repeated phrase "Chica, chica boom boom.")

- The primary goal or focus is on building language concepts
- Literacy learning (building a site vocabulary and reading story parts) occurs incidentally

Most classrooms use Layer 1 more or less consistently; however, teachers often mistake it as Layer 2. Consciously providing a Layer 2 experience for children with disabilities is essential since these children have simply not had many successful book interaction experiences. The stories selected in Layer 2 recapture that lost ground presenting text that reflects how a beginning communicator would speak or use a vocal output system.

LAYER 2: Supported Story Readings

- Supported stories are designed to teach literacy/language.
- The facilitator should concentrate on both the meaning and the exact text of the stories.
- The facilitator communicates the expectation that eventually children will be able to read the entire text of the story. The story itself fosters success through predictable text, repeated text, simple text, and simple graphics. Scaffolding (providing support only as needed) engages the young reader. The adult gradually reduces his/her responsibility in the reading interaction while the child's responsibility increases.
- The primary focus of Layer 2 reading is on building emergent literacy skills: book handling, book-reading skills, linking text with graphics, and building language concepts.
- Literacy learning occurs in a more intentional manner: that is, instruction is more text based but still highly interactive.

Strategies for Supported Story Readings

Musselwhite and King-DeBaun (1997) provide numerous suggestions for presenting and expanding upon stories. These specific recommendations suggest strategies for building early communication, language, and emergent literacy skills.

Small Groups

Books for learning work best when introduced in small groups of no more than three or four children. The small size lets children participate actively--a key element in learning (Cutting, 1989)-- and to take turns. Both factors are important reasons for paying attention to the stories.

Small-group learning is generally recommended for teaching literacy. John Pikulski reviewed five effective programs for preventing reading failure and concluded: "For at-risk children to be successful readers, individual or very small group (no more than 4 or 5 children) instruction is essential" (1994, p. 38). Watson, Layton, Pierce, and Abraham (1994) also found that small-group instruction was effective for children who have developmental disabilities.

Strategies to increase Participation

Several strategies can be used to increase attention, participation and engagement in story readings. The following suggestions are especially important for young children and/or

cognitively young students.

*Enthusiasm
*Puppets
*Using Props
*Non-Time-Dependent Repetitive Lines
*Participation in the Story Process

Strategies to Focus on Literacy/Language

Several strategies can be used to direct the child's attention to early literacy and language skills while reading the stories.The following suggestions are especially important for individuals who have had very limited expereince or exposure to early book reading interactions.

*Cued Reading
*Highlighting Key Concepts
*Modeling Communicative Interactions

Story Rereadings

During rereadings, when children are more familiar with a story's content, more opportunities can be provided for independent participation, predictions, and skill development. Obviously, participation in follow-up reading activities will vary from child to child based on their current skills and needs.

The facilitator may use one or two of these strategies periodically throughout the reading but should not overdo their use.

Rereadings are particularly effective for children with special needs in small group. Children who are not yet skilled at using augmentative communication systems can combine learning in communication, emergent literacy, and early cognitive skills during rereadings.

Matching Objects to the Story
Matching Photos to the Story
Matching Symbols to the Story

Focus on Oral/Device Reading

The child says lines from the story, with various levels of cues and prompts, or uses a voice output device to say the line. This includes both repetitive line insertion and story text insertion. Again, the facilitator communicates the expectation that eventually children will be able to read the entire text of the story. The story itself fosters success through predictable text, repeated text, simple text, and simple graphics. Scaffolding (providing support only as needed) engages the young reader. The adult gradually reduces his/her responsibility in the reading interaction while the child's responsibility increases.

Echo Reading
Choral Reading

LAYER 3: Supported Story Retelling

- The facilitator uses the story text to retell the story in song, play, and drama.
- The primary goal is to generalize concepts learned in the story reading and to further enhance the child's understanding of those concepts.

LAYER 4: Independent Story Readings

- The facilitator encourages children to read the story text and/or explore the stories independently. Such exploration may include story-listening from a computer or a tape-recorder but these activities should not be mistaken for independently reading the words on the page. Story text must be simple and short enough that children can successfully reread most of the words.

LAYER 5: Supported Story Construction

- The facilitator helps the children create story innovations by changing the text of the story slightly or by using photographs of children. (See the innovation page following each story.)
- The child rereads his/her story innovations.

LAYER 6: Skill Development- Actual literacy skill devlopment goes beyond the scope of this paper however, Musselwhite & King-DeBaun, 1997, pp.105-110.)provide suggestions and ideas for including this into storytime readings.)

- Word matching
- Phrase/sentence matching
- Phonemic awareness
- Recognizing punctuation, etc.
- Recognizing punctuation, etc.

Strategies for Using Books for Learning in Inclusion Settings

Often in typical classrooms the teacher present a book a week to the children with the books tying into a general theme or unit that lasts approximately one month. Sometimes this approach and the materials used are not appropriate for the child with disabilities. It is often difficult if not impossible to change a teachers curriculum if you are the "outside consultant." In this scenario, the child with disabilities does not have the opportunity to develop emergent literacy and language skills because the pace is too fast or the materials are just too overwhelming. One solution is to pull the child with disabilities with two typical peers (e.g. peers who are struggling readers) into a quiet location two to three times per week during the typical class storytime. The peers can change weekly or monthly- whatever arrangements are made with the teacher. This strategy provides the child with disabilities ample opportunities to practice, learn, and work on skills in a small group setting with typical peers. An appropriate story would be selected that reflects content similar to that of the stories being presented. The "selected" story

then becomes the child's "Book for Learning". The other two days per week s/he joins the class to listen to the books that the other children are reading. These books would be considered "Books for Enrichment". On the last week of a theme or unit the child with disabilities joins the class. The teacher reads the storytime story with the entire class giving the child with disabilities the opportunity to successfully participate in storytime with his/her peers.

Portions of this paper are from, King-DeBaun,P. (1999) Storytime: Using Stories to Promote Beginning Communication and Emergent Literacy Activities for Young Children with Special Needs REVISED Creative Communicating.

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